Chapter 1.

Statement of Problem
It is instructive to recall that the acts and episodes relating to pickpocketing have often been caricatured, in the creative literature with a view to entertaining the popular readership of fiction — whether novels or short stories, on the one hand, and/or satirizing on the craft of pickpocketing through its dramatic audiovisual presentations, on the other hand. In the former event, public amusement was the main objective; in the latter event, arousal of public censure and condemnation was the chief objective. The authors of creative literature were more concerned with the portrayal of the situations involving pickpocketing as an aberrant behaviour than with the definition of the act of pickpocketing as a crime. The depiction of pickpockets and cut-purses was the interest of the creative writers; the definition of pickpockets and cut-purses marked the legitimate domain of the
jurists. And, when criminology arrived as a new discipline, the juristic definitions started being subjected to their scientific treatment afresh inasmuch as new typologies of criminals as cutters or pickers of pockets and/or purses as well as newer lexonomies of crimes into professional, organized, syndicated and the like started being attempted. Interdisciplinary perspectives began yielding newer insights as more and more of authenticated and objective data from diverse cultural settings was gathered.

LAW LEXICONS AND PICKPOCKETING

Pickpocketing is classed under the generic category of theft. It has been regarded as a special variant of theft in so far it is confined to that mode of stealing which is in relation to the pocket (including the purse) of the victim. Legal dictionaries have given aphoristic and pointed definitions of pickpocketing. Some of which are being reproduced hereunder.

Whatton’s Law Lexicon has the following epigrammatic, explanatory note under the entry pickpocket picture:

"A thief who steals putting his hand privately into the pocket or purse of another".

(Lely 1892, 564)

under the entry on pickpocketing, Black’s Law Dictionary incorporates the following note:

"A thief who secretly steals money or other property from the person of another".

(Black 1951: 1305)
The entry on outpurse in whartons Law Lexicon reads as follows:

"One who steals by the method of cutting purse: a common practice when men wore their purse at their girdles as was once the custom."

(Lely op cit: 211)

The law lexicons apart, all dictionaries carry the entries including their variants and derivatives too. For instance, The Oxford English Dictionary defines a pickpocket as follows:

"One who steals from or 'picks' pockets: a thief who follows the practice of stealing things from the pockets of others."

(Philological Society 1933:827)

And the entry on pickpurse reads as follows:

"One who steals purse or from purse."

(Ibid)

The Readers Digest Great Encyclopaedic Dictionary puts pickpocket and outpurse thus:

"One who steals from pockets" and "one who steals by the method of cutting purses: a common practice when men wore their purse at their girdles as was once the custom."

(Readers' Digest Association 1964, 666 (Vol. II and 211 (Vol. I) respectively.)

It is interesting to note how proverbial usages and/or satirical expressions have invested the word pickpocketing with a variety of semantics. For instance, The Oxford English Dictionary has the following notes, quips and wits:
"They will dexterously pick pocket";
"A pickpocketing case, your worship";
"Pickpocketing is merely another form of gambling".

(Op cit)

Likewise, under pickpurses:

"All pickpurses' ears are not set on the pillory as yet";
"Hygge law (signifieth) robbery, rigging lawe, pickpurses arefte";
"Dive to the bottom of a true man's purse";
"Good cheap commodities are notable pick-purses" (Ibid)

Likewise, Sidney's passage — "I am no pickpurse of another's wit" (Ibid) and "to pick a person's brains" are suggestive of what is known as plagiarism (Homby et al. 1952: 951).

Criminological works and Pickpocketing:

When we turn our attention to the criminological explanations/definitions of pickpockets and outpurses as well as the occupationally specialized varieties of experts and their nomenclature, we find that a great deal of effort has gone into the systematization of typologies and taxonomies of these specialized criminals and their crime variants. Let us survey a sample of such academic endeavours.

Pickpocketing is ordinarily regarded as a form of sneak theft. D. W. Maurer has been treated it as an offence involving "successful robbery of money from a person without
his cooperation or knowledge" (Maurer 1964: 39). Identifying theivefold ingredients that go to make up the process of pick-
pocketing, Maurer has listed them as follows:

1. The selection of a victim;
2. The locating of the money on the victim's person;
3. The maneuvering of the victim into the proper
   position;
4. The act of theft; and
5. The passing of the stolen property. (Ibid).

Col. Maurice J. Fitzgerald of the U.S. Army has attempted their
seven-fold typology — each type having a name and characterist
of its own that mark it off from the other types:

"1. Bag opener — This thief's method of operation
   has two phases: first, the opening, second,
   the taking of the wallet, change purses, or
   loose bills from the pocket-book of his women
   victim.

"2. Patch pocket worker — Women who do not carry
   pocketbooks usually carry their money in an
   outside coat pocket. They are the victims of
   this type of pickpocket.

"3. Seat-tipper — He is a sneak thief, rather than
   a pickpocket, but since his victims are also
   women and his specialty pocket-books, he is
   classed with pickpockets. A seat tipper is a
   theater worker who usually operates in the day
   time when it is not crowded; but if he is
   forced to work at night, he will confine his
   activities to isolated sections of the balcony.

"4. Pit-worker — The criminal works on the inside
   pocket of his male victim — the 'pit'. He
   usually works in a group of two or three.
   The 'tool' or 'hook' takes the wallet and he is
   sided by his 'stalls'.

"5. Pants-pocket worker — This type of thief is
   the most skilled of them all. Using only two
   or three fingers, he will inch up the lining
   of his male victim's pants until he can
   grasp the money between two of his fingers and
   lift it out.
6. **Fob-worker** - Generally the fob-worker is an old-time pit- or pants-pocket worker who has lost his touch, or has been arrested so many times he has lost his nerve. He'll slip his fingers into the fob or change pocket and slip out whatever small change happens to be there.

7. **Lush worker** - Lush workers need a sleeping victim, preferably one with a few drinks too many. They find their victims in public transportation, trains, buses, trolleys, and waiting rooms, as well as in public parks. Most of them will "ound" their victim by kicking his foot as they go by, stepping on a toe; or sitting down heavily in the seat alongside of him. If he does not respond in some manner, they go to work. Unlike other pickpockets these criminals will take watches, glasses, fountain pens and anything else of value."


The aforesaid synoptic overview of typologies, taxonomies and processual delineation of pickpocketing goes to suggest that criminological researches and writings have treated is not only as a highly specialized, personalized variant of the crime of theft but also spotlighted its characterological specialties vis-à-vis other crimes akin thereto.
Historical Perspective

No systematic history detailing out the emergence, growth and development of different modes of pickpocketing as an offence or a profession is available, but oblique references are found in the creative literature of the past that throws some focused light on the pickpockets as a species of notorious offenders... those who, with the aid of their trained and skilled fingers as well as the sharp tools of their trade, as it were used to carry out their existence at the cost of others' pocket or purse. Classed under the category of theft, the craft of pickpocketing finds its earliest mention in Petronius' *Satyricon* whereas theft and prostitution as careers find their mention in Plutarch's *Lives* and Tacitus' *Annals*. Their depiction in the creative literature was introduced more for fun and
entertainment of the general readership than with any other
and in view.

As time rolled on, pickpocketing came to be regarded
as a profession and a crime of which law took due cognizance.
For, some definitive records and historical data got accumulated
about the various kinds of professional crimes by the
Elizabethan time. These were the "Tudor and early Stuart
tracts, pamphlets and ballads," depicting the style of life
of the professional criminals commonly known as "Rogues and
vagabonds, thieves and sharpers, conmen and connycatchers."
(Inciardi 1975:19) Describing the Modus opened and the
diagnostic marks of the two types of pickpockets the nip type who used a knife for securing the wallet or purse
of their victims (whence they earned their nickname as
cutpurse) and the foist type who relied on the dexterity
of their trained fingers, Inciardi continues.

The pickpockets frequented the resorts, assemblies, plays, and fairs, chiefly
those at St. Paul's, Westminster, Flat
street and the Royal Exchange. Often a
cohort would sing a ballad while the
foists drifted among the gathering
Crowd" (Ibid)

This is the depiction of the Elizabethan professional
criminals specialized in the craft of pickpocketing as
described in the pamphlets under the category of figgina. It
is also recorded how there were two types of nips city nips and country nips where the urban pickpockets
were more sophisticated than their rural counterparts. Like
vice, there was a marked distinction between the nip and
The fact is that the latter commanded greater prestige for their art than that of the former.

The tracts of Tudor and Stuart and the pamphlets describe several kinds of crimes—thieving and robbery, brothel keeping and swindling, pickpocketing and lock picking and so on. Such offenders were punished by the law of the land and were sentenced to vigorous imprisonments. From the Vagrancy Act of 1597 down to the first two decades of the eighteenth century, several European countries came to have such enactments that prescribed for transportation instead of penal servitude and hard labour. For it was with the turn of the sixteenth century that Colonization of North America was begun, and the thieves serving long terms in jails at home got legally transported as galley slaves to serve the colonizing masters abroad. These rogues and vagabonds had not suddenly come up; they had their own history of emergency rooted in the socio-political dynamics of an earlier period—the period that witnessed the phase of distillation of the feudal system, thereby giving rise to "the growing class of landless, masterless, and penniless men". It was these landless, masterless, and penniless people who had no feudal retrainers to feed them; and they got reduced to a state where "beg, borrow or steal" became their practical philosophy of life. Incirdi has very rightly summed up, thus:
"The wandering groups of vagabonds and masterless men who were unable to support themselves without land were joined by jugglers, minstrels, and gypsies. Disruptions in relations between landowners and labourers caused many peasants to become runaways. They were joined by those who had no desire to work, and by robbers, poachers and bandits, all of whom found a natural asylum in the forests where they began to build many of the cultural traditions that later shifted to the growing cities.

While the disintegration of the feudal order was encouraging initial development of a rogue and vagabond class during these early centuries, concurrent patterns of growth became evident in numerous urban settings that ultimately supported the transformation of vagabondage and roguery into professional criminality" (Ibid: 7-8)

Inciardi has also stressed the point how the bands and hordes of the early criminals during the pre-Tudor days had fortified the criminal enclaves and immunized them even against the King's writ, so much so that no police officer would dare penetrate into these criminal habitats—the underworld coming to be characterized as the bastard sanctuaries for their being the safest places of refuge on the earth.

**Contemporary Perspective:**

Pickpocketing as a crime has survived several centuries right from Plutarch's or Tacitus' days down to the present. Although the historical background given above highlights the scene in England and other European countries where transportation was presented as the legal punishment for rogues and vagabonds of different hues and shades, the criminal proclivity was not confined to the European continent alone,
it was fairly widely distributed. So is the case today.

'Professional crimes' like pickpocketing, shoplifting, safe and house burglary, forgery and counterfeiting, extortion, sneak-theiving, and confidence swindling are the non-violent criminal occupations which exist in all the civilized parts the world over. Likewise 'professional heavy crimes' including armed robbery, hijacking, burglary, arson and kidnapping constitute such serious offences that involve a high degree of skill, coercion and a certain amount of violence in their execution. And so do the 'organized crimes' like gambling, loan-sharking, commercialized vice, bootlegging, trafficking in narcotics, disposing of stolen merchandise and infiltrating legitimate which involve illegal goods and services and are world-wide in their occurrence today.

Criminology regards pickpocketing as a 'career crime' defined as "Offense behaviour that is pursued in an occupational context for the purpose of obtaining a steady flow of income", according to Inciardi. It is a 'Professional crime' in that it is "a non-violent form of criminal occupation pursued with a high degree of skill to maximize financial gain and minimize the possibility of apprehension", to quote again from Inciardi.

Treating the professional crime of pickpocketing as "a form of sneak theft for successful robbery of money from a person without his cooperation or knowledge", Maurer has
surveyed the pickpocket world in the United States and Great Britain in his scholarly work, *Whiz Mob: A Correlation of the Technical Argot of Pickpockets with their Behavior Pattern*. Maurer has also stressed the point how "the pickpocket of centuries ago differs little from his contemporary counterpart". The only difference between the pickpockets of the two distinct periods (that is, the Elizabethan period and the present) is the partial modification in their life-style including their dress and demeanour.

Furnishing startlingly revealing figures about the estimated monetary losses in the metropolis of Tokyo, Loren E. Edwards has put it in excess of $4,50,00,000 per annum (Edwards, 1958:79). He has collected similar information in regard to several big cities of the world: how the Mexican City tourists are alerted against youngsters and pickpockets; how pickpocketing is rampant in the city of Naples in Italy, as discovered by the Italian police (a craft in which even Italian women folk are engaged); how these pickpockets operate in such American cities as Washington, D.C., New York and Chicago taking a heavy annual toll which, however, does not touch the alarming point as it does in the case of Tokyo. (Ibid)

Dwelling on the crime condition in Los Angeles, Elmer Hubert Johnson has attempted an analysis of the various kinds of professional crimes, including pickpocketing, with a view to high-lighting the correlation between the crime rate and the nature of crime vis-a-vis warm and cold months, daytime and night-time, and so on, as the following passage and table reveal:
TABLE 1.1: Seasonal Distribution of Selected Type of Larceny, Los Angeles, 1961.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Months</th>
<th>Total Larcenies</th>
<th>Pocket Picking</th>
<th>Shop Lifting</th>
<th>Purse Snatching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>25.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>25.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>26.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL % 100.0 100.0 100.0 100.0

TOTAL OFFENCES 55,383 1711 3257 947

(Johnson, 1964:66)

Although pocket picking and shop lifting were distributed through the seasons rather consistently, pocket picking had a greater concentration in the warm months.
Edwin H. Sutherland has referred to a tribal folk from south India, the Bhamtacs, who are notorious for their exceptional pickpocketing skills.

The Bhamtacs, a tribe whose house is in the Deccan, work all over India. The Bhamta is a marvellously skilful pickpocket and railway thief. He frequents fairs, landing places, bazaars, temples — any place, in fact, where there is a crowd. The children are trained to crime from their earliest childhood, so it is not wonderful that they should become very expert and be always on the lookout for pray (Sutherland, 1939).

Harjot S. Sandhu turned his sear-hght on juvenile delinquency in order to spotlight the correction that exists between delinquency on the one hand and affluence as well as poverty on the other, while such factors as sex and class play their decisive role in regard to the nature of delinquency. The following passage bring out the differences in the nature and extent of crimes in the societies that live either in a culture of affluence or in poverty.

Affluent societies also offer more opportunities for delinquent acts — more cars, stores, night clubs, pubs and more places to rob. According to a special survey in Japan, 75 percent urban juvenile crimes were in some way connected with automobiles. Rape was most closely connected with the use of motor vehicles; 40 percent of the total in urban areas and 37 percent in rural areas. In Sweden, Toby found
the temptation to steal cars was proportional to the number of cars in use and the number of adolescents who felt dissatisfied with their share of them. In affluent societies, middle-class youth show a greater participation in delinquency though not officially. Examples are to be found in Canada, Israel, Japan, the Scandinavian countries, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union. A large part of middle-class delinquency in these countries is oriented to seeking excitement through drugs, sex, vandalism, auto thefts, drinking, and mob activities. Delinquency in underdeveloped countries is a product of the culture of poverty. A youth in New York steals a car, joyrides in it, and then wrecks it. A youngster in New Delhi steals the lion-cloth of a bather in the river Jarna to clothe an ailing mother. Though so different, both youths are delinquents. The two youths indeed come from very different cultures. The delinquent youth in India make a pathetic profile—generally very poor, one third of them orphans, with little or no schooling, unskilled, unemployed or earning pitifully low wages, living on the generosity of a relative, often runaways from home, occasionally having no place to live sleeping on the pavement, subject to homosexual attacks by fellow pavement sleepers, and with no hope either in the present or the future. This description of delinquents in India is also true of delinquents in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Sanhur, 1977)

In his scholarly work, The Ex-Criminal Tribes of India, Y. C. Sinhaedri has given a vivid and graphic description of the
Venukulas. A section of the tribe is specialised in pickpocketing. Their favourite haunts for pickpocketing operations are bus stands and railway stations. Finding the travellers busy buying tickets at the counter or struggling their way through the crowds while boarding a bus or train, they catch their victims unaware and pick or cut the pocket, as the case may be, as the opportunity arises. They carry blades and scissors on their person. It is also reported that they are adept in the technique of swallowing coins or small pieces of gold.

Simadzi has given interesting details about the Venukula art of pickpocketing and swallowing, based on an interview with a 70-year-old Venukula pickpocketor who said:

I can keep the rings or money in my throat without the knowledge of anybody, whenever I need, I can get it back. Sometimes I swallow. I will get it through the night soil. Two or three boys accompany me. I will give them training. The boys who are interested only in pickpocketing will come to me and request me to take them with me, so I take them and teach them the necessary techniques.

(Simadzi, 1979)

The 70 year-old Venukula was such an adept in the art that he pickpocketed two rings while serving his term in a jail. Simadzi has given the following account of it:

Once I was put in jail for pickpocketing. I requested the police to get me one cigarette. He would always say that
he would, but he never did so. I wanted to take revenge on him. He used to wear two rings. These two rings drew my attention. I wanted to acquire them. In the jail I used to message the police constables and officers. Once the policeman asked to message his body. He removed his rings and put in his shirt. The shirt was kept on the nearby wooden stool. Once I went inside and asked my co-prisoner to pick up the rings and drop them in my mouth when I start giving the policeman hot water bath and he would close his eyes. My fellow prisoner did accordingly. After the bath the policeman wanted to wear the rings, but they were not found. He checked my body and clothes. Where were they? They were in my throat. He never knew. Later on, I took the rings out and hid them, when my wife came to see me, I handed the rings over to her.

The professional pickpocket finds himself at ease while thieving although he is at home while picking the pocket or purse of his victim. This is clear from the following interview of another 60-year-old Yanukula pickpocket informer:

I am a pickpocketeer. I cannot go for thieving. One night I went out with one of my Yanukula thieves. But I failed to do the job. It was not my profession. I cannot enter a house in the night.

And a seventeen-year-old adept put it in this way:

I do not like stealing. I cannot do it. It is not my profession. I am a pickpocketeer. Sometimes I get rupees 80 to 100 a day. Pickpocketing is easier than stealing. Further
we have to spend a lot of money before we go for theft. But in pickpocketing we do not have to invest. In pickpocketing we simply get something from the victims. I feel at home in pick-pocketing but not in stealing.